

Snacking Tips for Healthy Kids

Kids are active and growing and may need a snack between meals (about every 3-4 hours), if they get hungry.¹ Discourage kids from eating snacks before meals and eating when they are not hungry. Help kids develop good habits by modeling healthful eating behaviors, and providing opportunities for physical activity (at least 1 hour every day).

Guidelines:

- Keep beverage choices healthful. Choose low fat milk (1 cup serving), water, and moderate amounts of 100% fruit juice (the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than a 4-6 oz. serving of 100% fruit juice a day for ages 1-6 and no more than an 8-12 oz. serving for ages 7-18). Flavored low fat milk or soy milk is also a great alternative.
- Avoid soda, sweetened juice drinks, and sports drinks!
- Look for snacks that have at least 2 grams of fiber per serving listed on the nutrition label.
- Choose whole grain snacks as much as possible. Look for the word “whole” as one of the first ingredients on the product label.
- Keep fresh fruits and veggies readily available. Wash and prepare snacks such as carrot and celery sticks ahead of time, then keep in the refrigerator for easy snacking later.
- Choose low fat dairy products (for children over age 2), like low fat cheese, cottage cheese, sour cream, yogurt, and milk.
- Aim for snacks low in fat, sugar and sodium. The Mayo Clinic recommends choosing snacks that have close to 5% of the daily value for fat, sugar, and sodium, and not more than 20% (this is listed on the nutrition facts label)—except nuts and nut butters, as they contain a healthy type of fat.
- Snacks that include at least two of the major food groups are best (grains, meats & beans, milk, fruits, and vegetables). For example, an apple with peanut butter, cottage cheese with peaches, or carrot sticks with hummus.
- Make it a good habit for kids to brush their teeth or at least rinse their mouths with water after they finish eating snacks. Sugary snack foods that stick in the teeth pose the greatest risk for tooth decay.

¹Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research 2004

Food Allergies:

Some people have food allergies or intolerances. Food allergies or intolerances can cause reactions such as sneezing, coughing, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, hives, rapid heart rate, shortness of breath, and rashes. People who have severe food allergies may not be able to touch or be in the same room with the food allergen. People with mild food allergies usually only need to refrain from eating the food, but can be near it. Food allergies are most often caused by proteins in milk, eggs, corn, nuts (especially peanuts), seafood, soy products, and wheat. Other foods frequently identified with bad reactions include meat and meat products, fruits, and cheese. Food intolerances are caused by an individual's inability to digest certain foods. Intolerances have adverse reactions to food that do not involve an allergic response. Generally, larger amounts of a food are required to produce the symptoms of an intolerance than to trigger allergic symptoms.

Developed by the Children in Balance initiative at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy of Tufts University

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